

Temple Terrace arts center a 'go' for now as cost climbs to \$9.2 million

By Debbie Carson, Staff Writer

TEMPLE TERRACE — The Temple Terrace City Council has decided to move forward with plans for its Community Arts and Education Center. They voted unanimously at their last council meeting to set aside land within the downtown redevelopment area for the facility.

They worked one caveat into the motion – revisit the center after 12 months of fund-raising to determine if the funds will be there.

The city will take up forming a fund-raising committee at the next council meeting in August.

“We’re never going to know if we can raise the money if we don’t go out there on the street and begin to do it,” said Councilman Ron Govin, who is serving as the council’s liaison during negotiations with the development team Pinnacle/Ram.

Leading up to the council meeting, city leaders had said that the arts center would cost approximately \$7 million, including a \$1 million endowment set up for operations.

But at the July 15 council meeting, Michael Marshall, the city’s new redevelopment director, said that the center could cost between \$9.2 million and \$10 million.

“It looks tough on paper,” Marshall said of funding the center, noting that the only funding that has been essentially secured is \$2.5 million from the city’s Community Investment Tax. The council still has to vote to approve the allocation of the funds.

The city expects to receive a \$500,000 grant from Hillsborough County, but with the way the county has been cutting its budget, the grant funds might not come.

Also, Pepin Distributing has pledged to raise \$2 million for the arts center – a pledge that came more than a year ago when the economy was still strong.

Perhaps sensing that the city might balk at including the arts center within the project, representatives from the development team wooing the city extended an olive branch of sorts.

Pinnacle/Ram has offered to give the city the piece of land for the arts center instead of charging them \$500,000.

What the land gift essentially means for the city is that Pinnacle/Ram won’t cut \$500,000 from its offering price of \$14.9 for the entire first phase downtown property. However, Pinnacle/Ram would still have control over what can be a part of the center – and how.

Councilman Frank Chillura has been critical of the city’s inclusion of the arts center property in the downtown area, saying that if the city had wanted to maintain full control of the center, it shouldn’t have included the property in the land portfolio for sale.

He again reiterated his concerns about the land remaining the city’s but having the developer’s strings attached and mentioned the possibility of converting the Just Brakes building to the south into a theatre for Masque Community Theatre.

He also pointed out that Pinnacle/Ram would want the arts center within its development because it would be a selling point for the developer.

The arts center would serve more interests than solely Masque, according to the city’s plans. The first phase of the building would include 22,000 square feet consisting of an auditorium with retractable seating for 400, office space for the Greater Temple Terrace Chamber of Commerce, administrative office space, three classroom studios, and a lobby that also serves as an art gallery.

The second phase could include a second story that is 8,000 square feet consisting of more classrooms and offices.